

# **Community Education/Youth Development**

## **A Dialogue Toward Common Ground**



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# Introduction

***"Youth development specialist and community educators found more brings them together than keeps them apart."***

Youth development specialist and community education workers have a common client, but often function as parallel service providers—or, worse, work against each other.

And while there are real differences between youth development and community education—funding and accountability being significant areas—there is also commonality.

Early in 2000, the commonality was the subject of conversation between Gordon Raley, President and Chief Executive Officer of the National Assembly of Health and Human Service Organizations, and Starla Jewell-Kelly, Executive Director of the National Community Education Association. What emerged was an idea to gather authoritative people in both areas to discover and then walk that common ground. The idea gained fruition November 9 and 10 when Raley, Jewell-Kelly and 14 others gathered at the National Center for Community Education in Flint, Michigan.

The 16 participants found that more brings them together than keeps them apart. Working in small groups and as a whole, they discovered that while terminology often differs, the concepts are often the same. And that the most basic goal—serving the youth of this country—is best achieved by cooperation, not competition.

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# The Case Study

***"Shared decision-making is the most prominent principle."***

At the beginning of the Flint Dialogue, participants were asked to review the following case study and comment on it:

The Elmtown neighborhood is in the southeast corner of a large metropolitan city. It is a community situated around a major meat and fish packing plant, and most of the adults are unemployed or work long shifts at the plant. There are two overcrowded, old elementary school buildings, and one 10-year-old, overcrowded school building shared by middle and high school students.

A district-wide community school director has been trying to develop community education for five years. However, the school administration is not very supportive and space is extremely limited. Usually, kids just hit the streets after school.

Two blocks from the middle/high school is a YMCA that has existed for 10 years in an old warehouse building. Many of the kids just wander over after school for the variety of activities, mostly recreational sports and swimming, that are offered by the YMCA.

In between the school and the YMCA is a large church building with an activities center, including a small gymnasium and several classrooms. The space originally was a department store. The church bought it five years ago as a temporary headquarters until it was able to build a new church building several blocks away.

The move is now imminent and the church has agreed to provide the building and land to the Elmtown Schools or the YMCA, as a place to serve youth, their families and the community.

A committee has convened to study which agency(s) should have the building and what kind of programs, based on what "principles," should be offered. As the Community Education Director or as the YMCA Director, you have been asked to serve on the Church Committee. What should be the function of the facility and what should be the role of each stakeholder in running it? The following are reactions and selected comments about the case study dialogue from the participants:

**Starla-Jewell Kelly:** "They should play to their strengths. If the Y is good at a program, it should run it. If the church is good at another, it should run it."

**Paige Crockett:** " They should collaborate and offer academics, not just recreation."

**Hannah Puczko:** "Shared decision-making is the most prominent principle."

**Jill Waters:** "It needs to be collaborative and it needs to be in writing: who owns it and what the vision and goals are."

**Thom Campbell:** " I don't think the church should abandon the building. You need a consortium."



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**Gordon Raley:** " The hope for the kids lies in both youth development and community education. So I would like to see it go the Y with the stipulation that they do community education."

**GeMar Neloms:** "The center itself needs to address the needs of the unemployed adults."

**Susan Farrell:** "They need to bring in the business and faith communities."

**Thom Campbell:** " The program ought to reflect the culture of the community"

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## COMMON GROUND

***"We're all about the same thing, we're just often using different terms."***

Finding common ground between youth development and community education was a major goal of the Flint Symposium. Participants chose to find that ground by looking inward at each discipline.

"We're all about the same thing, we're just often using different terms," said Dan Cady, Executive director of the National Center for Community Education, where the symposium took place.

The task was to identify successful elements and characteristics in each area. The participants were asked to find characteristics of good youth programs, rulers against which programs could be measured. After discussing the issue for about an hour each, lists were drawn up. Then came the difficult part: agreeing on where the roads intersected to form the common ground.

Not surprisingly, there were differences between the school-based community education characteristics and the agency-based youth development specialist.

On the youth development side, transportation was a huge issue. Just getting the youth to and from the programs can often dictate the success or failure of their programs.

They cited a core age group of 6 to 12 years-olds being served. Youth development specialists also did not feel the pressure to increase the young peoples test-scores. They felt their outcomes were not, and should not be test score based. Their core age group reflected the K-12 model.

For community educators, transportation was not as crucial an issue. Schools are often neighborhood-based and busing solutions often are already in place. Accountability is often a huge issue in community education. The community educators cited that they often reported to school officials and that this affected their programs, particularly in the area of contributing to improved standardized test scores.

There is also a difference in vision. Youth development workers usually shared the same vision as the administrators of their programs, while community educators, reaching for a share of thin school resources, are often at odds with the administrators of the schools.

Nevertheless, in the end there was a consensus. The two groups realized there are far more similarities than conflicts. And the list of common elements and characteristics they develop reflects that consensus.

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# **The Characteristics**

The Flint Symposium on community education and youth development compiled this list of characteristics common to all good programs serving youth, be they school-based or community-based.

- Offer choice in programming;
- Establish the trust, safety and comfort of youth;
- Encourage parental and family involvement;
- Offer staff development;
- Provide for partnerships and collaborations;
- Outcome-based and focused;
- Mandate formal registration of program participants;
- Involve youth input in program planning;
- View youth as resources;
- Nurture and develop social skills;
- Empower youth;
- Feature positive, caring adults and others who are committed to youth as role models;
- Respect and reflect cultural differences; and
- Enhance and enrich the educational development of youth.

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## The Glossary

***"You can't run a program because you think it's a good idea. You have to run a program because it's what the community needs."***

Like two bordering nations, allied in purpose but speaking different languages, community educators and youth development specialists have long been handicapped by a communications problem.

Both exist to serve much of the same constituency, and in most cases both do excellent jobs of serving. But collaborations often are stymied by the fact that different vocabularies are used.

One goal of the Flint Dialogue was to explore those vocabularies, identify the similarities and differences, and establish common priorities by finding words and phrases essential to both disciplines.

In early discussions, panelists found that many community education programs had youth development counterparts that were essentially the same, although they often were called by different names.

And, of course, the community educators worked out of existing school buildings while the youth development specialists worked from other venues.

To initiate the discussion on vocabulary, participants developed a list of words, concepts and phrases specific to youth development and community education. The list follows:

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**Youth Development:**

Adolescent Pregnancy, Adult Role Models, After-School Programs, Asset-Based, At-Risk, Character Development, Civic Participation, Cognitive Competence, Collaboration, Community Development, Community Service, Community-Based Organizations, Culturally Competent, Deficit-Based, Developmental Needs, Diversity, Facilities, Fully Prepared, Fun, Healthy Starts, Human Development, Leadership Development, Marketable Skills, Mentoring, Moral Competence, National Youth Policy, Non Academic Programs, Non-School Hour Programs, Ongoing Relationships, Opportunities to Give Back, Peer Counseling, Physical Competence, Positive Youth Development, Prevention, Primary Prevention, Protective Factors, Resiliency, Resources Assessment, Risk Factors, Safe Place, School-Based Services, Secondary Prevention, Service Learning, Social Competence, Structured Activities, Summer Programs, Vocational Competence, Weekend Programs, Youth Serving Organization, Youth Accessible, Youth Development, Youth Participation, Youth Centered,

**Community Education:**

21stCCLC, Adult Education, After-School Programs, Asset-Based, Brokering, Child Development, Cognitive Development, Collaboration, Community Development, Community Education, Community School Continuing Education, Cross-Generation Programming, Curriculum Enrichment, Daytime Enrichment, Duplication of Resources, Facilities Development, Family Involvement, Family Learning, Foster Grandparents, Higher Education, Human Development, Integration. Interagency Cooperation, Lifelong Learning, Lighted School, Mentors, Needs Assessment, Overlap and Duplication, Parent Education, Parent Involvement, Resources Assessment, Services, Tutors, Womb to Tomb.

Some words and phrases on the list such as Collaboration, Community Development and Asset-Based were identical. However, others that came up just short of that standard included Youth Development and Child Development; Non-School Hour Programs and After-School Programs; Mentors and Mentoring.

The participants shared their personal assessment of the following phrases:

### **Collaboration**

"Without collaboration you're ignoring the most basic thought: that developing a youth is holistic. No one is an expert on everything."

### **Asset-based**

"This means giving young people what they need to be successful and not assuming that because they are problem-free they are truly prepared." It's more inclusive than exclusive."

### **Family Involvement**

"For me that's the difference between perceiving the need and identifying the need. If the family is not there to identify the need, you are only driven by those perceptions."

### **Youth Development and Empowerment**

"In my mind, youth development is such a broad term that it encompasses what everybody does who works with youth. When there are teachers teaching students, the teachers are developing youth. They're doing it academically, but they're developing youth. I think of youth development as a broad umbrella over everybody who works with youth."

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**Needs/Resource Assessment**

"You can't run a program because you think it's a good idea. You have to run a program because it's what the community needs."

**Diversity and Cultural Sensitivity**

"In our society, we must have an awareness that not everybody comes from the same background and neighborhood."

"Diversity in and of itself is a very positive thing because different people bring different points of view to the table."

**Youth Centered**

"It's the whole thing. It brings us back to the core of what we're all about: putting the youth in the middle."

**Lifelong Learning**

"Lifelong learning is teaching a child how to learn. It's not just offering programs for all ages. Hopefully what we are doing is teaching that child how to learn for his or her whole life."

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